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17. AN INSTANCE OF PLAY BEHAVIOUR IN BLACK DRONGO *DICRURUS ADSIMILIS* (BECHSTEIN)

The Black drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis*, might possibly be the most agile, courageous and playful of all our common birds.

While watching birds in a small patch of scrub jungle at Aakkulam (13 km from Trivandrum city) on 7.11.93, a peculiar behaviour of two Black drongos caught my attention. The birds, both of which were juveniles, were seated on two branches of a cashew tree (*Anacardium occidentale*) about 3 m above ground. One of them was repeatedly scolding the other one in harsh notes, the head being bowed down with every call note. This bird can be assigned a symbol (A). The second bird (B) replied promptly and this verbal cacophony continued for some time. Then the bird (A) plucked a dry leaf from a nearby branch, and bending calmly, dropped it deliberately. The

other one (B) quickly went after it twisting and turning gracefully, following the leaf in its spiral path downwards. Just as the leaf was a foot from the ground, the drongo darted at it and catching in its feet, transferred it to the beak and returned its perch, all in one clear graceful motion. Now it was the turn of (B) to drop the leaf and (A) to retrieve it. This fascinating play continued for the next two minutes after which the drongos, presumably losing interest in the game flew away, one chasing the other, both twisting and turning sharply and uttering harsh calls.

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18. NOTES ON THE OCCURRENCE OF THE YELLOWTHROATED BULBUL *PYCNONOTUS XANTHOLAEMUS* (JERDON) AT SHEVAROYS, TAMIL NADU

While stationed at Yercaud (11°47' N, 78°12' E) for five months as part of a project on the Indian Tree Shrew *Anathana ellioti* funded by World Wildlife Fund — US through World Wide Fund for Nature — India, Tamil Nadu State Office, I had the opportunity to observe the Yellowthroated Bulbul *Pycnonotus xantholaemus* a species endemic to South India.

Yercaud is situated 28 km north of Salem town. Yercaud is the main town in Shevaroy hills which form a major component of the southern section of Eastern Ghats. The plateau atop Shevaroys is almost entirely under coffee. The habitat where observations were made was a dense scrub and degraded deciduous forest with rock outcrops at the edge of a coffee plantation on the southern slopes of Shevaroys, about 2 km from Yercaud.

The species was first seen during a preliminary trip in January 1992. Between January and July *P. xantholaemus* was seen on 13 occasions and heard several times. Of these the species was sighted once during the preliminary surveys and twelve times during the actual project period between 10 February 1992 and 10 July 1992. On eleven occasions *P. xantholaemus* was seen

along the southern slopes of Shevaroys which also happened to be the study area for the tree shrew project. But for an individual bird that was seen along the ghat road connecting Salem and Yercaud at an altitude of about 1000 m above MSL on 14 March, all the other sightings and observations were made at an altitude of about 1200 m above MSL.

When the species was first sighted on 30 January 1992 along with J.N. Prasad, a single bird was seen in the company of a pair of Fairy Bluebirds *Irene puella* that were seen feeding on *Ficus* sp. The bulbul was seen flycatching at the base of the same tree which was growing out from a dark rock crevice.

Two birds were seen on 22 March, of which one was seen carrying a dry twig. Later in the day an individual of the species was seen chasing another one. On 25 March, fibres from the bark of *Firmania colorata* were collected by an individual following which the pair flew away. Again on 25 March one pair was observed feeding the other with a fruit of *Canthium dicoccum* and the behaviour appearing to be typical of courtship feeding. Since the bird which was being fed did not adopt begging posture it was assumed

that both the birds were adults and belonged to a pair. Such feeding activity is considered to be a prelude to the commencement of breeding (Welty 1982).

Further, the birds were seen feeding on *C. dicoccum* thrice and on *Ficus nervosa* once. On all the occasions they were seen in pairs. On 13 April a bird which was sitting on a huge boulder flew up on the trunk of a *Anogeissus latifolia* tree and perched upright in a manner typical of woodpeckers.

The present report of *P. xantholaenus* is the first ever of the species from Shevaroyis. The observation on the food habits indicates that *C. dicoccum* and *F. nervosa* are two new food sources of Yellowthroated Bulbul not

recorded earlier. Also, the fact that the birds were indulging in courtship feeding and carrying nesting material indicate nesting activity of the species, and this also happens to be the first ever record of the species breeding outside their designated nesting period as recorded by Ali and Ripley (1987) and Allen (1908). It appears that at Shevaroyis the species commences its breeding activity as early as March.

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19. STONE CHAT *SAXICOLA TORQUATA* (LINN.) IN KERALA

According to SYNOPSIS (S.D. Ripley 1982, BNHS, Bombay) the distributional range of the race *indica* of *Saxicola torquata* extends to southern Karnataka in the Indian peninsula. Baker and Inglis in BIRDS OF SOUTHERN INDIA (1930, Madras Government Press, Madras) state that this race occurs in winter in the hills of north Mysore and Travancore, quoting Stuart Baker, though they did not find it anywhere in the Madras Presidency. Sálím Ali did not include this species in BIRDS OF KERALA (1969, Oxford University Press, Delhi) nor is it included in A BOOK OF KERALA BIRDS (Neelakantan, K.K. *et al.* 1993, WWF-India, Trivandrum).

On 19 October 1993, during a birdwatching trip to Kattampalli (11° 55' N; 75° 20' E), a wetland near Kannur, we came across two pairs of Stone Chats—two males and two females. Three of these were perched on small bushes (*Crotalaria* sp.) and grass tussocks on the bund at the water's edge. One male could be observed clearly for a long time as it perched on top of a mound of straw in the field, making short ariel sallies to catch insects like a flycatcher.

The male birds appeared to be in the autumn moult — the black of head and throat had changed in dark rufous except for an eye-streak from the lores to the ear-coverts. They had rufous breast, black tail tipped buff and white upper tail-coverts. The female birds were light brownish overall with streaked upperparts, buffish white underparts, black tail and pale rump and upper tail-coverts. The white half collar on either side of the neck in the male birds was clearly visible. The white wing patches were not visible on closed wings, but could be clearly seen when the birds flew. The birds were seen flicking their wings and tail frequently.

One of us (CS) has been regularly visiting Kattampalli since 1980, but never came across this species before. This is the first record of this species in Kerala to the best of our knowledge.

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20. WINTERING OF INDIAN BLUE CHAT *ERITHACUS BRUNNEUS* (HODGSON) AND PIED GROUND THRUSH *ZOOTHERA WARDII* (BLYTH) AT NANDI HILLS, SOUTH INDIA

Nandi Hills (13° 22' N, 77° 41' E), a popular hill resort and picnic spot in Kolar district, Karnataka is located about 60 km north of Bangalore. Known also as the Nandi Durg, it is the tallest hillock (1435 m above MSL) within the 28.37 sq. km Nandi State Forest and supports a rich

variety of flora and fauna (Boraiah and Fatima 1970, Ali 1942, Ghorpade *et al.* 1974).

The hill-top plateau of Nandi Hills has a small patch of evergreen forest with coffee plantations. *Coffea arabica*, *C. iginoides* and *C. robusta*, which appears to